



The Angels of Christmas

Hearing God's Voice in Advent
Week 4





Opening Prayer

Lord, as we prepare our hearts and minds during this Advent season, give us the spirit of the shepherds who first heard the news of Jesus's birth. Reanimate our sense of wonder and amazement at what you have done for us. And grant us the courage to find our voices and pass along, not just through our words but especially through our actions, the good news of great joy that your angels delivered for all humankind. Amen.



What Matters Most

God reaches out to us through messengers, whether they're heaven or purely human, complete strangers or people we know well. "God is trying to tell you something!"

The angels of Christmas came to deliver important messages to people who were hoping for God to intervene in a mighty way, both in the fears and darkness of their personal lives and in their world.



Review of Last Week

- ★ Mary & Gabriel - let it be
- ★ Mary & Elizabeth - sanctuary
- ★ Joseph - Acting on the Unbelievable
- ★ Where do you believe God may have been at work to send a message to which you have not yet responded?
- ★ How will you be more willing, in response to message from God, to step out with the faith of Mary and say, "Let it be"?



Hark the Herald Angel Sing



An Angel and the Shepherds













Why Me?

- ★ Why did God's angels choose me, nobody special, nobody who would carry any weight with the powerful people in my society, to be the first to receive the most amazing news the world had ever heard?





They Were Terrified

- ★ Why do you think the shepherds were afraid at the appearance of the angels?
- ★ Why do you think our initial impulse to something unexpected is fear? How is that impulse helpful? How can it be harmful?
- ★ Can you think of time when you were terrified to receive news that turned out to be good?
- ★ How can fear hold us back from experiencing something new and amazing?



An Unexpected Christmas

- ★ When have you experienced a Christmas where nothing seemed to unfold as you had imagined? Where in the midst of it all, were you able to feel God's presence?
- ★ What do you think Mary & Joseph might have said to each other after everyone left and they reflected on what had happened?
- ★ How could they have related their experience in Bethlehem to the message they had separately received from the angels?



An Unexpected Christmas

- ★ The moment the angel revealed to Mary that her child would be called the the Son of God, she would have known there would be conflict with the ruling powers representing the Roman emperor, who also had been proclaimed as the Son of God.
- ★ How might Mary's experience with the angel, and with the arrival of visitors to the manger, have prepared her to be mother to a child who was destined for conflict?



Shepherds

1 Samuel 17:34-36

But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father, and whenever a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth, and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. Your servant has killed both lions and bears, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.”



Shepherds

Psalm 23 ~ The Divine Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil, for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.



Shepherds

John 10:11-16

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.



Shepherds

Genesis 48:15

He blessed Joseph and said,

“The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

Revelation 7:17

for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone
astray;
we have all turned to our
own way,
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Shepherds

- ★ What did we learn about shepherds?
- ★ Why do you think God chose shepherds to be the first to receive and then spread the word of Jesus' birth?
- ★ In Luke many on the lower rungs of the status-conscious Roman society were attracted to the message that in the body of Christ there were no distinctions between rich and poor, enslaved and free, male and female. How might Luke's inclusion of the shepherds near the beginning of his Gospel have helped draw the have-nots to these early Christian communities?



Shepherds

- ★ If Jesus was born today who would God send angels to herald his birth?
- ★ Have you ever witnessed something so wonderfully amazing that you had to tell others right away? How did it feel to share the news? Does this help understand how the shepherds might have felt?
- ★ Have you ever been delegated as a messenger to deliver important news to someone?

Being an Angel

- ★ What does it mean to be a guardian?
- ★ How are we as Christians called to be a guardian for others? What is it that you are helping to “guard”?
- ★ How does understanding your role as a guardian connect to Martin Luther King’s statement that we are connected by “an inescapable network of mutuality”?
- ★ Dr. Robb talks about “long-term angels” who can produce a lasting impact on our lives or the lives of others over time. Have you ever thought of an angel in this way? WHO would you consider to be a longtime angel?

Being an Angel

- ★ Think about angels in popular culture. How would you describe them?
- ★ How is that different from the image we have of angels from the Bible?
- ★ Why do you think that in our culture's angels tend to provide comfort during difficult times or shepherd people through danger? What does this reveal about how we see God working in our world?
- ★ Think back on the meaning of the word Advent. How does fulfilling the role of an angel in someone's life prepare your heart for a visitation from the King?
- ★ How does it help prepare the way for the arrival of God's Kingdom?







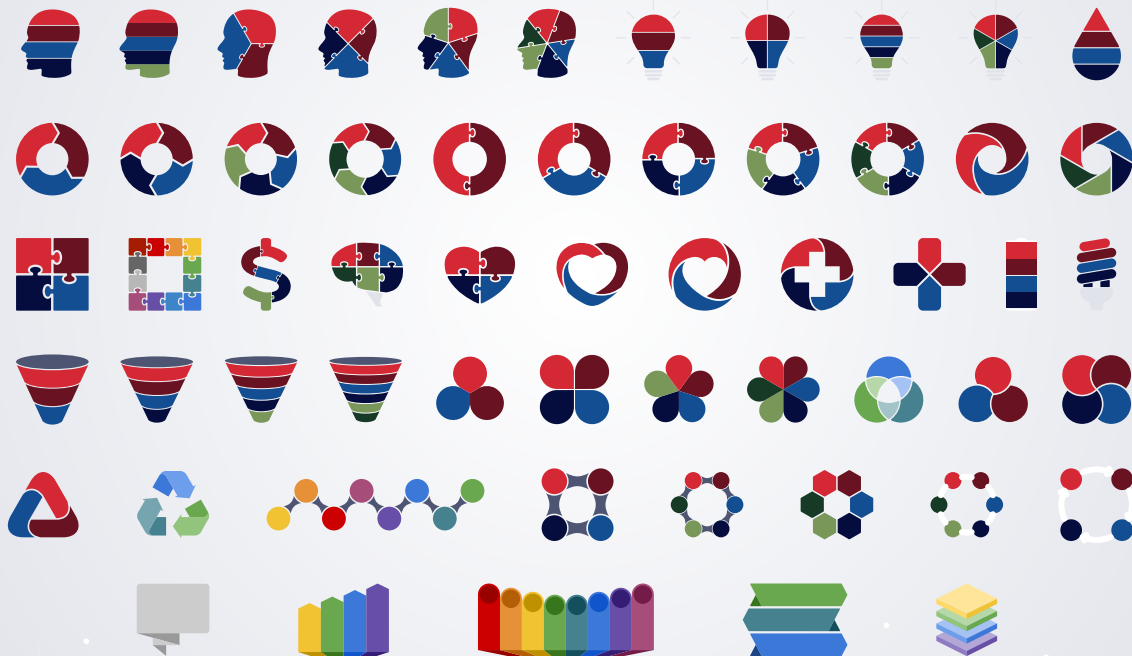
Closing Prayer

Lord, we remember how you sent your angels to bring the news of how you were working in our world. And we know that in Jesus you came to stay, that you are working each day to reveal your love for every last one of us. We know that you still work through angels in our midst, in ways we don't fully understand, and that sometimes you call on us to be your messengers who help people feel your presence. Help us to be faithful to that call and to your message so the good news of your rescuing and enabling love spreads like the light of the dawn onto a world where many still feel surrounded by darkness. Amen.



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01

Ho ho ho

Let's start with the first set of slides